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ABSTRACT

Prepared as part of a comprehensive study of reading in Virginia, this report contains data gathered in a survey of elementary and secondary reading teachers and specialists and adult basic education teachers to determine teacher needs in that state. The report provides an analysis of the responses to the 72-item questionnaire used in the survey and a summary of the conclusions. Among the conclusions reported are that Virginia teachers believed that they were providing sound reading instruction, but that they were concerned about the lack of adequate planning time and assistance. (A copy of the questionnaire is included.) (FL)

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READING INSTRUCTION IN VIRGINIA'S SCHOOLS

Report of the Right To Read Reading Assessment Survey

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DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION
Department of Education
Commonwealth of Virginia
Richmond, Virginia 23216

September 1976

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PREFACE

Appreciation is expressed to superintendents, principals, supervisors, and teachers for assistance in completing the Virginia Reading Assessment Survey. The assessment survey instrument was designed to ascertain the degree to which selected aspects of the instructional program are needed and practiced in the teaching of reading. The findings are contained in this report.

Special appreciation is expressed to Dr. Betty Yarborough, professor of education at Old Dominion University, who served as consultant in developing the survey instrument and in the preparation of this report.

Bernard R. Taylor, Director
Division of Elementary Education
Director, Virginia Right To Read

INTRODUCTION

As a Right To Read state, Virginia has joined other states across the nation in an organized effort to eliminate the "blight of illiteracy" in this decade. The Right To Read Program in Virginia is dedicated to improving reading instruction in the public schools so that each student may recognize the full measure of his or her potential for learning to read. In addition, efforts have been increased to raise the reading level of out-of-school persons with severe reading deficiencies.

For many years Virginia has recognized the importance of reading. As a consequence, reading scores in its public schools are encouraging. Test scores, as released by the Testing Service, Virginia Department of Education, indicate that average reading scores for the fourth grade during the first half of the present decade have clustered around the 50th percentile (average for the nation). Sixth-grade scores moved from the 42nd percentile in the 1972-73 school year to the 48th percentile in the 1974-75 school year, again approaching the national average. The 1974 eighth-grade reading scores were at the 42nd percentile, but the eleventh-grade scores were at the 47th percentile. Generally, therefore, the reading achievement of Virginia students is equivalent to that of students in other states. More importantly, test data suggest that the achievement of Virginia students tends to be commensurate with their ability. From these data, it is evident that Virginia is providing "right to read" opportunities for an increasing number of public-school students.

Improvement also has been noted in the reading competencies, as reported by the Adult Basic Education Service, Department of Education, of out-of-school persons. The percentage of the adult population completing no schooling dropped from 2.7 percent in 1960 to 1.6 percent in 1970, and the percentage of the total population completing only one to four years of schooling dropped from 10.5 percent in 1960 to 6.0 percent in 1970.

Averages do not reveal data on individuals, however. A comprehensive assessment of the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor functioning of students at the fourth-, sixth-, ninth-, and eleventh-grade levels was conducted in Virginia between 1970 and 1975. The study, known as the Virginia Educational Needs Assessment, revealed that no region or school division in the state is totally without learner needs in reading. In every school division there are students whose achievement in reading is well below their potential—students who have not realized their "right to read." Furthermore, it is estimated that one adult in every 20 in Virginia may be functional illiterate. In the public schools, and also in the adult population, there are large numbers of children and adults whom Virginia educators wish to identify and to assist by providing increased and more productive opportunities for learning to read. This goal is the major impetus of Virginia's Right To Read effort.

To gain a comprehensive view of reading in Virginia and to plan strategies for mobilizing efforts and personnel to assume Right to Read responsibilities, a State Agency Task Force was convened in 1975 by

the State Right To Read Director. The Task Force was composed of representatives from the following divisions and programs of the Department of Education: Division of Educational Research and Statistics, Division of Elementary Education; Division of Secondary Education, Adult Education Service; Division of Secondary Education, English Service; Division of Special Education; Division of Teacher Education and Certification; Division of Vocational Education; Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title I; Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Titles III and IV-C; and Program Evaluation.

The State of the Art of Reading in Virginia, a publication prepared by members of the Department of Education staff, details the findings of the Task Force. Eighteen studies are described which depict a wide range of efforts to assure all Virginians the opportunity of acquiring needed skills in reading.

The data presented in **The State of the Art of Reading in Virginia** clearly reflect Virginia's commitment to reading. Yet, the Task Force's analysis of the data available suggested that considerably more information was available relative to learner needs than teacher needs. In fact, there was very limited information regarding teacher-oriented needs or how reading was taught in the state. Questions such as whether persons teaching reading were adequately trained or whether there was adequate leadership in reading instruction at the local level remained unanswered.

As a result of the findings, the Task Force recommended that additional data relative to teachers and the teaching of reading were needed if the goals of the Virginia Right To Read Program were to be realized. Accordingly, a survey was conducted during May 1975 to assess teachers' perceptions of reading instruction. The report that follows presents a summary of the results of the survey (an assessment of the needs in reading instruction in Virginia) as perceived by a representative sample of elementary classroom teachers, elementary classroom teachers with reading specialist endorsements, secondary teachers of reading, and adult basic education teachers.

More detailed technical information concerning the study may be obtained from the Division of Elementary Education and the Division of Educational Research and Statistics, Virginia State Department of Education.

VIRGINIA READING ASSESSMENT SURVEY

In the fall of 1975, the Right To Read Task Force, representing the divisions and programs of the Department of Education, formulated strategies for conducting a reading assessment in Virginia. Specific kinds of information to be gathered were designated and a survey instrument was designed to assess teachers' perceptions of needs in the teaching of reading and the degree to which these needs were being met.

The resultant questionnaire contained 72 items related to seven major topics:

I. Roles (of persons implementing reading programs)

II. Professional Preparation (of teacher respondents)

III. Competencies in the Teaching of Reading (of teacher respondents)

IV. Program Planning

V. Program Implementation

VI. Program Assessment and Evaluation

VII. Community (support of and involvement in the reading program)

For each item on the questionnaire teachers indicated on a five-point scale first, the degree to which an item was needed in the teaching of reading, and second, the degree to which the item was practiced or in evidence within the school setting. The scale used on the questionnaire was:

Degree of Need	Degree of Practice
1. Not needed	1. Not present
2. Needed to a limited degree	2. Present to a limited degree
3. Needed to a moderate degree	3. Present to a moderate degree
4. Needed to a significant degree	4. Present to a significant degree
N. Not applicable	N. Not applicable

The questionnaire was distributed on May 3, 1976, to a 10 percent random sample of teachers across the state. The sample population numbered 2,168 and included elementary classroom teachers, elementary classroom teachers with reading specialist endorsements, secondary reading teachers, and adult basic education teachers. In all, 1,440 valid responses (66 percent) were received and constitute the basis for this report.

Items Rated Most Needed

Analysis of survey results indicates that the following 10 aspects of a reading program in rank order, were perceived by all teachers surveyed as those of greatest importance:

(1) Adequate student-teacher ratio in classes where reading is taught;

(2) Sequential developmental reading instruction in basic skills;

(3) Continuation of the developmental reading program into the secondary school;

(4) Competency in assessing the needs and progress of students;

(5) Availability of an appropriate range of instructional materials and resources;

(6) Sequential developmental reading instruction in study skills;

(7) Using methods and materials to meet the objectives of individual students;

(8) Availability of services for students with special needs;

(9) Availability of a library or media center to support the reading program;

(10) Confidence in and support of the reading program by parents.

Items Rated Most Practiced

The 10 aspects of a reading program identified by the respondents as being best met, according to degree of practice, were, in rank order:

(1) Grouping within the class;

(2) Placement of students for reading instruction according to reading level;

(3) Sequential developmental reading instruction in basic skills;

(4) Classroom management;

(5) Use of achievement tests;

(6) Competency in assessing the needs and progress of students;

(7) Reporting reading instructional levels regularly to parents;

(8) Record-keeping for student progress in reading;

(9) Use of code emphasis/phonics approaches to teaching reading;

(10) Competency in using methods and materials to meet objectives of individual students.

It should be noted that the following three aspects were identified by the respondents as being among the 10 most needed and als among the 10 most widely realized in practice:

(1) Sequential developmental reading instruction in basic skills;

(2) Competency in assessing the needs and progress of students;

(3) Competency in using methods and materials to meet the objectives of individual students.

Virginia teachers indicated that sequential skills programs, supported by adequate provisions for assessment of student progress and by appropriate instructional methods and materials, were vitally needed and were being realized to a major degree in classrooms across the state.

Items for Which Degree of Need Equalled Degree of Practice

The 10 items viewed by teachers as ranking highest in terms of the degree to which the need equalled the degree of practice were the following:

(1) Grouping within the class;

(2) Use of achievement tests;

(3) Undergraduate courses in education (other than in reading education);

(4) Reporting standardized test scores regularly to parents;

(5) Placement of students for reading instruction according to reading level;

(6) Use of code emphasis/phonics approaches to teaching reading;

(7) Reporting reading instructional levels regularly to parents;

(8) Classroom management;

(9) Attending workshops and meetings;

(10) Reporting test scores (other than standardized test scores) regularly to parents.

It is interesting to note that although the above items are regarded as being met in practice to the degree of need, none of these is among the 10 ranked highest in overall importance. Two are among the 10 items considered to be of least importance:

(1) Reporting standardized test scores

(2) Attending workshops and meetings.

Items for Which Degree of Need Exceeded Degree of Practice

The 10 items which teachers perceived as reflecting the greatest discrepancy between need and degree of practice were as follows:

(1) Released time for professional growth;

(2) Continuation of the developmental reading program into the secondary school;

(3) Availability of tutorial services in teaching reading;

(4) Adequate student-teacher ratio in classes where reading is taught;

(5) Paid aides to assist in carrying out the reading program;

(6) Volunteer aides to assist in carrying out the reading program;

(7) Assistance for parents who have children with special needs in reading;

(8) Efforts to involve out-of-school persons who need reading instruction in programs available to them;

(9) Availability of community resources which are helpful in teaching reading;

(10) Financial support for professional growth.

None of the items ranked least important were regarded as ones for which degree of importance exceeded degree of practice. Two items viewed as very important were among those reflecting the widest difference between importance and degree of practice:

(1) Continuation of the developmental reading program into the secondary school

(2) Adequate student-teacher ratio in classes where reading is taught.

The remaining eight items that were identified as reflecting a discrepancy between need and practice were not among the 10 regarded as most important, but neither were they among the 10 regarded as least important. They, therefore, reflect points of concern to teachers which should be given consideration.

Items for Which Degree of Need Exceeded Degree of Practice by Category

The item for which the need most notably exceeded practice in each of the seven major categories of the questionnaire, according to the respondents, was as follows:

I. Roles (of persons implementing reading programs)

Need—Availability of tutorial services in the teaching of reading.

II. Professional Preparation (of teacher respondents)

Need—Released time for professional growth.

III. Competencies in the Teaching of Reading (of teacher respondents)

Need—Competency in assessing the needs and progress of students.

IV. Program Planning

Need—Involvement of classroom teachers in divisionwide planning for reading improvement.

V. Program Implementation

Need—Continuation of the developmental reading program into the secondary school.

VI. Program Assessment and Evaluation

Need—Use of diagnostic tests.

VII. Community (support of and involvement in the reading program)

Need(s)—Assistance for parents who have children with special needs in reading.

—Efforts to involve out-of-school persons who need reading instruction in programs available to them.

Responses Per Teacher Group

The survey data were analyzed separately by respondent groups (elementary classroom teachers, elementary classroom teachers with reading specialist endorsements, secondary reading teachers, and adult basic education teachers) in addition to being analyzed for the total population polled. The three needs among the top 10 that all four groups ranked highest in terms of discrepancy between importance and practice were the following:

(1) Released time for professional growth;

(2) Availability of tutorial services in the teaching of reading;

(3) Availability of community resources helpful in teaching reading.

Three of the four groups ranked the following as being unmet to the degree needed:

(1) Continuation of the developmental reading program into the secondary school;

(2) Volunteer aides to assist in carrying out the reading program;

(3) Financial support for professional growth;

(4) Provisions to help the lay public understand the reading program;

(5) Involvement of classroom teachers in divisionwide planning for reading improvement.

There were, therefore, eight needs among the top 10 that as many as three of the four groups of respondents jointly regarded as unmet in practice to the degree of apparent importance. Each group, however, named at least one need among the top 10 reflecting the importance-

practice discrepancy that no other group regarded as such. The priorities by teacher group were as follows:

Elementary Classroom Teachers

Need—Paid aides to assist in carrying out the reading program.

Elementary Classroom Teachers with Reading Specialist Endorsements

Need(s)—Provisions for reading instruction for out-of-school adults.
—Involvement of parents and other lay persons in divisionwide planning for reading improvement.

Secondary Reading Teachers

Need—Confidence in and support of the reading program by parents.

Adult Basic Education Teachers

Need—Involvement of reading resource personnel and specialists in divisionwide planning for reading improvement.

Conclusions

Broadly considered, the 1976 assessment of the needs of persons with responsibilities for teaching reading in Virginia has pointed to several considerations that should be of concern to both the professional and lay community. Among these considerations are the following:

(1) Virginia teachers feel that sequential developmental instruction in basic skills is being provided most students. This finding should be welcomed by persons who are advocating a "back to the basics" approach.

(2) Individual students are placed for reading instruction according to their reading levels. Students are grouped within the classroom by teachers who feel they are effective in classroom management and who are competent in assessing student needs and progress. Various teaching methods and materials are available, and a record-keeping system monitors student progress. Virginia teachers, in reporting that these practices are present to a relatively significant degree in their classrooms, are indicating that the hallmarks of individualized instruction, a concept popular in schooling today at all levels, is a reality for many students in Virginia.

(3) Phonics approaches to reading are being used to the degree desirable according to the teachers surveyed.

(4) Teachers are concerned about the lack of continuation of the developmental program into the secondary school.

(5) Teachers feel some lack of assistance in carrying out their duties—expressing need for both paid and volunteer aides and tutorial services for their students.

(6) Teachers are concerned about the professional demands made upon them. They see themselves as needing released time for professional growth, and more community resources made available to them.

(7) Teachers feel that increased assistance should be given to parents who have children with special needs.

(8) Teachers feel that greater efforts should be made to provide assistance for out-of-school persons who have adult reading needs.

(9) A primary area of concern for teachers is greater support of and involvement in the reading program by the community.

Virginia teachers believe that they are providing reading instruction that is sound in skill development and is tailored to the needs of individual students. They reflect a confidence in their professional skills that is, to some degree, suprising in a decade in which the credibility of the schools is being questioned by many groups representing a variety of interests.

The teachers indicated, however, concern for the lack of time for adequate planning and the assistance needed to perform their duties more effectively. Most importantly, teachers are now looking to the community for help. In essence, they have expressed the need for a vote of confidence from the public. As a result of the Reading Assessment Survey, it is hoped that each school division in Virginia will examine its reading program and, by use of the data contained in the report, strive to assure every child the "right to read."

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23216

READING ASSESSMENT SURVEY, 1976

LEGEND

Degree of Need

1. Not needed
2. Needed to a limited degree
3. Needed to a moderate degree
4. Needed to a significant degree
N. Not applicable

Degree of Practice

1. Not present
2. Present to a limited degree
3. Present to a moderate degree
4. Present to a significant degree
N. Not applicable

Degree of Need	I. Roles	Degree of Practice
1 2 3 4 N	1. Leadership of the principal or chief instructional leader in the reading program	1 2 3 4 N
	Availability of support services in the teaching of reading	
1 2 3 4 N	2. Diagnostic services	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	3. Remedial services	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	4. Tutorial services	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	5. In-school supervision of reading program (other than of principal or chief instructional leader)	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	6. Central-office level leadership services for the reading program	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	7. Job descriptions of persons implementing the reading program	1 2 3 4 N
	II. Professional Preparation	
1 2 3 4 N	8. Undergraduate reading education courses	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	9. Student teaching and other practicum experiences	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	10. Graduate reading education courses	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	11. Other undergraduate courses in education	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	12. Workshops and meetings	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	13. Personal reading of books and journals	1 2 3 4 N

Degree of Need						Degree of Practice				
1	2	3	4	N	14. Locally planned in-service programs	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	15. College or university sponsored in-service programs	1	2	3	4	N
					Support for professional growth:					
1	2	3	4	N	16. Financial resources	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	17. Released time	1	2	3	4	N
					III. Competencies in the Teaching of Reading					
1	2	3	4	N	18. Assessing the needs and progress of students	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	19. Identifying specific learning objectives according to the needs of individual students	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	20. Using methods and materials to meet objectives of individual students	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	21. Teaching students of various cultural backgrounds	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	22. Communicating with parents and others	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	23. Classroom management	1	2	3	4	N
					IV. Program Planning					
1	2	3	4	N	24. Continuous division-wide curriculum planning in reading	1	2	3	4	N
					Comprehensive division-wide planning for reading improvement involving representatives from:					
1	2	3	4	N	25. Classroom teachers	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	26. Reading resource personnel and specialists	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	27. General supervisory persons and administrators	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	28. Parents and other lay persons	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	29. Students	1	2	3	4	N
					V. Program Implementation					
1	2	3	4	N	30. Organized reading program based upon stated objectives consistent with student needs	1	2	3	4	N
					Sequential developmental reading instruction in:					
1	2	3	4	N	31. Basic skills	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	32. Study skills	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	33. Literature	1	2	3	4	N

Degree of Need		Degree of Practice
	Student placement for reading instruction according to:	
1 2 3 4 N	34. Reading level	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	35. Skills needed	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	36. Coordination of reading instruction with other elements of the language arts	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	37. Locally developed curriculum guide for implementing the reading program	1 2 3 4 N
	Method(s) for teaching reading:	
1 2 3 4 N	38. Code-emphasis/phonics	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	39. Linguistics	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	40. Language-experience	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	41. Individualized reading/self-selective	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	42. Combination of approaches/ eclectic	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	43. Alternative reading approaches for students with unique needs	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	44. Range of instructional materials and resources	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	45. Library or media center to support reading program	1 2 3 4 N
	Organizational pattern(s) for reading instruction:	
1 2 3 4 N	46. Grouping within the class	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	47. Grouping among several classes	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	48. Independent activities	1 2 3 4 N
	Persons assisting in carrying out the reading program:	
1 2 3 4 N	49. Paid aide(s)	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	50. Volunteer aide(s)	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	51. Freedom for teachers to be creative	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	52. Adequate pupil-teacher ratio in classes where reading is taught	1 2 3 4 N
1 2 3 4 N	53. Continuation of the developmental reading program into the secondary school	1 2 3 4 N
	VI. Program Assessment and Evaluation	
1 2 3 4 N	54. Use of tests consistent with the objectives of the reading program	1 2 3 4 N

Degree of Need						Degree of Practice				
1	2	3	4	N	55. Readiness testing for specific pre-reading skills	1	2	3	4	N
					Types of tests used:					
1	2	3	4	N	56. Achievement	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	57. Diagnostic	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	58. Specific skills	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	59. Record-keeping for student progress in reading	1	2	3	4	N
					Information reported regularly to parents:					
1	2	3	4	N	60. Reading instructional levels	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	61. Standardized test scores	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	62. Other test scores	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	63. Specific strengths and weaknesses as to skills development	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	64. Observations of work habits of students	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	65. Continuous evaluation of the reading program	1	2	3	4	N
					VII. Community					
1	2	3	4	N	66. Provisions to help the lay public understand the reading program	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	67. Assistance for parents who have children with special education needs in reading	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	68. Community resources helpful in teaching reading	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	69. Confidence in and support of the reading program by parents	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	70. Confidence in and support of the reading program by community leaders	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	71. Provision for reading instruction for out-of-school adults	1	2	3	4	N
1	2	3	4	N	72. Efforts to involve out-of-school persons who need reading instruction in programs available to them	1	2	3	4	N

The average number of students for whom I provide daily reading instruction and/or direct assistance is _____(1) 1-15; _____(2) 16-30; _____(3) 31-45; _____(4) 46-60; _____(5) 61-75; _____(6) more than 75.

The number of student-contact hours which I spend weekly in teaching reading totals: _____(1) 1-6; _____(2) 7-12; _____(3) 13-18; _____(4) 19-24; _____(5) 25-30; _____(6) 31-36.

Any concerns or important aspects of the teaching of reading which have not been covered in this instrument, please indicate below.

ATTENTION: ADULT BASIC EDUCATION INSTRUCTORS

The following questions are to be answered by Adult Basic Education instructors ONLY:

I am a member of the ABE staff of the _____

School of the _____ Public Schools

My school serves an area which is: _____rural; _____urban; _____suburban.

I have been in my present position: _____1-5 years; _____6-10 years;

_____11-15 years; _____16-20 years; _____more than 20 years.

My total professional experience includes: _____1-5 years; _____6-10 years;

_____11-15 years; _____16-20 years; _____more than 20 years.

My sex is: _____female; _____male.

My highest academic degree is: _____less than a Bachelor's; _____Bachelor's;

_____Bachelor's with graduate credits beyond; _____ Master's; _____Master's with graduate credits beyond; _____Certificate of Advanced Study; _____Doctorate.

The Virginia certificate which I have is: _____ Collegiate; _____Collegiate Professional: _____Graduate Professional.

My Virginia certificate includes my endorsement as: _____a reading teacher; _____a reading specialist; _____not endorsed for reading.